



"Oh for the touch of a
vanished hand; And the
sound of a voice that is
still."

HOW CHRISTMAS DAY IS SPENT IN THE SUNNY SOUTHLAND

IT is a curious fact that the North has only a meagre knowledge of the Southern Christmas. The people of Dixieland have their own way of celebrating the great day. There is something about it that is distinctive—a subtle something that only those familiar with the fond traditions and customs of the South may fathom.

To the lucky Northerner who happens to spend a Christmas in the South it all comes as a revelation. He sees in the day a significance that had never attached to it in the commercial North, where he has been wont to see the birthday of Christ

celebrated. If the man from Pennsylvania or New Jersey or New York were to drop in at some plantation home bright and early on Christmas morn he would see some things to astonish him sure enough. In the height of the celebration he would doubtless be led to exclaim:

"My gracious! What does this stazing of skyrockets, banging of giant crackers, booming of cannons, clanging of cow bells and terrific shouting of all the people mean? It's worse than any Fourth of July!"

And so it is. It is a custom that has long been cherished in the cities and towns of the South from Baltimore to New Orleans.

In some places indeed the people go even further than that, and bring out their brass bands and soldiers and have the gayest kind of a parade, in which old and young alike join with the greatest enthusiasm. Then intuitively all true Southern hearts turn to the soul-inspiring airs that are such treasures of melody in Dixieland. Out over the hills and dales roll the sweet notes of "Dixie" and "My Maryland," and the people are in a heaven of happiness. For isn't it Christmas? And that is a magic word to these custom-loving folk.

But it must be admitted that some of these cherished customs are declining. The noise and bustle and pyrotechnics of

the old South are gradually losing their popularity. Doubtless the time is not far distant when they will disappear entirely. And yet one cannot see these old customs die out without a feeling of pity. Even the discordant noise is not without its charm. The "old masters" of the South, in those enchanted days of long ago, before invading armies had swept over the fields of cotton, were wont to cherish all of these Christmas customs. To them it was not mere noise; it was heart-cheering music.

But not all of the customs attending the day are on the decline. Many of them are still treasured in every house in Dixie-

land. Nor are those at all likely to lose their charm for generations to come. The negroes are the greatest sticklers for time-honored customs. They are celebrating Christmas at the present day just about the same as they did in the days of "befoh de wah." To the black man it is a day of merriment and licensed plunder. What plantation in all the South escapes a scene something like this on Christmas morning?

A dark, cloudy platoon forms down about the old negro quarters in the early dawn. The march is taken up as soon as there is evidence of life in the "big house."

The dark platoon halts immediately around the wide front door and the vine-clad windows. A score or more of expectant faces beam up at these who are certain to be there awaiting their coming. Then there is a melodious chorus of: "Crisimus gif, ole massah; Crisimus gif, ole mis."

And whoever heard of these greetings going amiss? It has been the same for so many, many years that no one in all of Dixieland can remember a Christmas when black hands and arms and hearts did not go away laden with the good things that seem to come from nowhere.

In particular in these old Southern homes, "Ole massah and missus" have perhaps heard the same greetings for so many years that they have come to love them and treasure them just as zealously as do the colored folk. They have their "gifts" all ready, and there is naught but happiness in the land where the magnolia blooms.

Altogether Christmas is a great day in the South. The people there are more lavish in its celebration than they are in other parts of the country. Not only the immediate family, but uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, friends and servants, sometimes mounting up in the hundreds, are remembered.